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April 12, 2005

John Bolton, Kofi Annan, and U.N. Reform

The United Nations can provide a locus of stability as the international order continues to evolve, but only if it remains faithful to the principles contained in its charter and to the vision and intent of its founders.

— John Bolton, October 1, 1990

Introduction

President Bush's recent nomination of John Bolton to be the next U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations provides the latest catalyst for an important discussion of U.N. reform. This discussion was begun in earnest last year following allegations that the U.N.'s Oil for Food program was riddled with corruption. More recently, the debate has continued with revelations that a senior U.N. official was found guilty of sexually harassing U.N. employees — and that U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan knew about and hid the case report. Additional revelations of U.N. peacekeeping abuses, as well as the failure of the United Nations within the past decade to prevent genocides in Rwanda, Bosnia, and arguably Sudan, have only further made the case that the U.N. is ineffective in executing some of its most core missions.

As the world reflects on the 60th anniversary of the U.N.'s founding, it is an appropriate time for Congress to evaluate how the U.N. is serving the interest of its members, and how it is carrying out its mission as established by its founders.¹ This examination should focus on restoring the body to its original intent — the promotion of freedom, peace, and respect for human rights— and should proceed in a way that reflects the interests of America and its democratic allies.

On March 21, Kofi Annan released a 63-page report outlining his recommendations for reforming the United Nations (the latest of numerous reform reports released by the United Nations, foreign governments, and nongovernmental bodies). Included in his report were a series of recommendations to reform the U.N.'s political and management structures. Conservative Members of Congress would find some of the reforms acceptable (such as strengthening internal auditing and oversight functions), but some would be completely unacceptable (such as strengthening the International Criminal Court and proposing that the United Nations be the sole authority in determining when military force can be used).

¹ As stated in Article I of the U.N. Charter, one of the main purposes of the United Nations is to “achieve international co-operation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character, and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion.” The Charter was signed on June 26, 1945 and brought into force on October 24, 1945.

While Mr. Annan's report was rich in high-sounding management reforms, it lacked ways to make the U.N. itself more representative of the democracies (i.e., freedom promoters and protectors) that largely fund it.² While he recommended creating a "Democracy Fund" in the United Nations that would provide assistance to countries seeking to establish or strengthen their democracy, that idea was first proposed by President Bush before the U.N. General Assembly (UNGA) in September 2004. In fact, historically lacking in Annan's recommendations and his past major speeches and initiatives are those steps necessary to address the democracy deficit within the United Nations among its member states.

By contrast, John Bolton — the man derided by his critics as being anti-U.N. and anti-multilateral — has argued that the United Nations suffers from a lack of legitimacy due to the international body's non-democratic tendencies, as reflected by a good deal of its members.³ Though the essential basis of the United Nations itself is the advancement of freedom, the body — most notably in the General Assembly — is dominated by countries opposed to this ideal. The most blatant testament to this is the fact that only 44 percent of the 191 U.N. member states voted with the United States last year in the UNGA on resolutions supporting respect for human rights and democracy.⁴ Bolton has referred to the failure of the U.N. Human Rights' Commission, which is composed of both true democracies and dictatorships, to "criticize one of their own" by passing resolutions condemning human rights abuses in particular countries.⁵

There may not be much that Annan can do to salvage his reputation as the leader of the world's largest political institution that oversaw many of the recent scandals. However, he can still leave the world body vastly improved by listening to and working with John Bolton to adopt long-overdue management and democratic reforms of the United Nations.

Bolton and the U.N.

Within hours of the March 7 announcement that this distinguished U.S. diplomat was the President's choice to serve as America's chief representative at the United Nations, opponents began objecting to the nomination, stating that Bolton's past comments on the ineffectiveness of the organization were too anti-U.N. and anti-multilateral.⁶ It seems his critics are unwilling to accept the mounting evidence over the past decade of the U.N.'s ineffectiveness. Bolton's past comments were accurate; more importantly, they were designed to provide a roadmap for the reform — not the destruction — of the world's largest multilateral body.

More than a decade ago, John Bolton, who was then the Assistant Secretary of State for International Organizations under President George H.W. Bush, argued that good management

² It should be noted more than 80 percent of the U.N.'s budget comes from the leading 14 industrialized democracies.

³ John Bolton, "America's Skepticism About the United Nations," *U.S. Foreign Policy Agenda: The United States and the United Nations*, May 1997.

⁴ U.S. Department of State, "Voting Practices at the United Nations, 2004," <http://www.state.gov/p/io/rls/rpt/c14622.htm>.

⁵ Testimony by John Bolton, Assistant Secretary of State for International Organizations, before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, October 1, 1990.

⁶ Senator John Corzine (D-NJ), March 7, 2005 Press Release, http://corzine.senate.gov/press_office/record.cfm?id=232901; Fred Kaplan, "Bush to U.N.: Drop Dead," *Slate*, March 7, 2005; Senate Democratic Policy Committee, "The State of Democracy in the Middle East," March 17, 2005.

and oversight of the United Nations would have two key benefits. The first would be the assurance that U.N. programs and activities benefit the poor, or help maintain international peace and security in a more effective manner; the second would be the increased support of the American people. As the Assistant Secretary, he wrote and spoke extensively about the U.S. concept of reform through a “unitary United Nations” that sought to ensure management and budget reforms across the U.N. System, not just the U.N. Secretariat.⁷

Lost among the critics’ charges against Bolton is the recognition that he repeatedly stated that the U.N. serves useful functions, helps advance U.S. policy, and is an important institution for U.S. foreign policy interests. In 1997, he wrote that “traditional peacekeeping, together with the often-important role the agencies of the U.N. system play in international delivery of humanitarian assistance, can work and *should be continued*.”⁸ He added that the United Nations can be a “useful tool in the American foreign policy kit,” and that the United Nations “should be used when and where we choose to use it to advance American national interests.”⁹ And, in 1999, in a debate on the value of the United Nations, Bolton stated that he has “never been one to doubt that we should remain in the United Nations” because “I do think it can be an effective instrument of American foreign policy” and that the U.N. Security Council “can be a very effective place for the exercise of American diplomacy and the advancement of American interests.”¹⁰

So, while his previous comments may have taken a hard line, their purpose was to show that the United Nations is an institution that America wants to succeed, but to do so, it must be reformed and its inefficiencies and ineffective aspects must be addressed.

Bolton as a Partner in Reform

The Congress appropriates annually more than \$500 million in U.S. taxpayer dollars to the United Nations. The United States has been, and will likely continue to be, the U.N.’s largest single contributor to its regular budget (the U.S. contribution to the United Nations’ regular budget is 22 percent or about \$300 million per year). The United States is also the single-largest contributor for most of the major voluntary organizations such as UNICEF, WFP, and UNDP, as well as to the U.N. peacekeeping operation fund.

These kinds of U.S. financial expenditures deserve oversight and scrutiny. Senator Norm Coleman (R-MN) has led the effort in the Senate to investigate the United Nations and the demand for real management reforms. Sen. Coleman has also endorsed Mr. Bolton’s nomination, believing it will ensure that the Oil-for-Food scandal and the wider issue of U.N. reform are properly addressed. “In Bolton, you get somebody who wants to make sure the U.N. is working with us to do the right thing.”¹¹ Other Republican Senators have also endorsed Bolton’s nomination, including Senator John Sununu (R-NH), chairman of the Foreign

⁷ Remarks by John Bolton, Assistant Secretary of State for International Organizations, “Concept of a ‘Unitary UN,’” October 1989, http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1079/is_n2151_v89/ai_8139913.

⁸ Italics added. John Bolton, “The Creation, Fall, Rise, and Fall of the United Nations,” *Delusions of Grandeur*, CATO, 1997.

⁹ John Bolton, 1997.

¹⁰ Remarks by John Bolton in a debate hosted by Common Ground on “The Value of the United Nations,” August 7, 1999.

¹¹ Steve Dinan, “Bolton Faces Confirmation Fight,” *Washington Times*, March 21, 2005.

Relations' Subcommittee on International Operations, who stated that Bolton can be "very helpful and very constructive in making the U.N. operate more effectively," and that "he's raised concerns in the past about its effectiveness."¹²

In a recent speech, former Senator Tim Wirth (D-CO), current President of the U.N. Foundation, highlighted Bolton's strengths and the prospects for bringing a reform agenda to the United Nations. As Sen. Wirth stated:

"It may be that he will go to the U.N. with a clear agenda from the President about what this Administration wants the U.S. relationship with the U.N. to be If this agenda is clearly defined as a stronger, more efficient and reformed UN, there's a chance that, as some pundits have written, Bolton could be the Richard Nixon to China."¹³

There are strong indications that Annan, too, welcomes the Bolton nomination and believes he needs Mr. Bolton to help him execute a meaningful reform agenda. In testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on April 11, Mr. Bolton stated that he recalled talking to Kofi Annan, whom he has known and worked with for 16 years. Mr. Annan congratulated him and told him to "get yourself confirmed quickly" since there was a lot of work to do.¹⁴ Mr. Annan's newly appointed chief of staff, Mark Malloch Brown, has been actively spreading this message on behalf of the U.N. Secretary General. He told the *Wall Street Journal* he looked forward to having Mr. Bolton "as the U.N.'s ambassador to the U.S."¹⁵ And speaking to *Fox News*, he said a U.S. ambassador to the U.N. "has to be very effective in New York, but he also has to be very effective in Washington. And, of course, that's where there's a real silver lining to John Bolton's appointment, because if he can corral the different congressional points of view and the administration's point of view into a single set of recommended reforms for the U.N., which we can respond to, that's good news for us."¹⁶

Addressing A Key Reform: The U.N.'s Democracy Deficit

Annan made the following remarks on June 27, 2000 in Poland:

"When the United Nations can truly call itself a community of democracies, the Charter's noble ideals of protecting human rights and promoting 'social progress in larger freedoms' will have been brought much closer. When the founders of the United Nations met in San Francisco more than half a century ago, they knew that no foundation of peace would be sturdier than democratic government."¹⁷

Annan could not have been more correct. However, he has never really pursued a course of action that would have brought about such democratic change. Just last week, the State Department released the "2004 Voting Practices in the UN Report," which stated that the U.S. was disappointed to see a "phenomenon" take hold in the UNGA's body dealing with human

¹² *Roll Call*, "Three in GOP Wary of Bolton Pick," March 9, 2005.

¹³ Remarks by former Senator Timothy Wirth (D-CO) during question-and-answer session of a speech to the Center for Philanthropy and Public Policy at the University of Southern California, March 22, 2005.

¹⁴ Remarks by John Bolton during testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on April 11, 2005.

¹⁵ *Wall Street Journal*, "Sudan and the U.N.," April 7, 2005.

¹⁶ Mark Malloch Brown speaking on "Fox News Sunday," March 13, 2005.

¹⁷ Address by U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan, "Towards a Community of Democracies," June 27, 2000.

rights and democracy (i.e., Third Committee) — “the growing support for no-action motions to avoid dealing with resolutions” on such anti-democratic countries such as Belarus, Sudan, and Zimbabwe.¹⁸ It is time for Annan to propose steps necessary to realize the “Charter’s noble ideals.”

Announcing these additional reforms would be critically important for a number of reasons. First, as noted previously, the U.N. is in need of a major overhaul. Many leading countries have called for U.N. reform. No less than six governmental and non-governmental bodies — including two by the U.N. itself — will be providing their own comprehensive reform recommendations. Even Susan Rice, a former top State Department official under President Clinton, wrote recently, “At the 60th anniversary of its founding, the United Nations has rarely been more relevant or in greater need of reform.”¹⁹

Second, nation states need to know that the United Nations is a partner and a resource, not an enemy or an irrelevant institution. Since its founding, the United Nations has been composed of a substantial number of member states led by dictators and terrorist supporters. Their collective policies and attitudes have confounded the international body’s ability to fulfill the Charter’s founding principle. Perhaps the most vivid effort to overcome this was the Clinton Administration’s effort to create a Democracy Caucus at the United Nations among like-minded member states that share a common commitment to freedom and democracy. The Democracy Caucus — established in part out of frustration by member states in not being able to advance democratic principles within the UNGA — has served as a network to advance resolutions and initiatives consistent with democratic values.²⁰

In outlining his democracy reforms, Annan should propose the following:

- **Declare that his primary goal is to address the democracy deficit with the U.N.** He should state that there is no greater reform than ensuring the openness and transparency of the institution, as required of any body founded on democratic principles. The U.N. is nothing if it is not democratic. No U.N. peace or humanitarian mission can have meaning if the U.N. itself does not support democratic values and work to advance freedom around the world.
- **Reaffirm that the U.N.’s mission should be the advancement of democracy and freedom throughout the world.** Annan should state clearly that democracy is the only form of government that protects those fundamental freedoms, and that it is time to make the U.N. a truly democratic body. He should state that his legacy is to embark on a path to ensure that the U.N. lives up to the vision of its founders in the Charter. He should ask for the support of all member states in achieving this and explain to them—specifically the nondemocracies—why the time for denying democratic rights has passed and the examples of Ukraine, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Iraq, and Afghanistan show that the yearning for freedom and respect is too powerful to resist.

¹⁸ U.S. Department of State, “Voting Practices at the United Nations, 2004.”

¹⁹ Susan Rice, “John Bolton: Tough Love or Tough Luck,” *Washington Post*, March 8, 2005.

²⁰ Remarks by U.S. Undersecretary of State Paula Dobriansky, “U.S. High-Level Segment Statement at the Sixty-first Session of the U.N. Commission on Human Rights,” March 17, 2005.

- **Ensure that the Democracy Fund becomes a viable source of freedom promotion.** With both President Bush and Secretary General Annan proposing the Democracy Fund, it is imperative that such an outlet for supporting nascent democracies is brought to fruition. Newer democracies generally lack the resources and expertise to build the institutions that a functioning democracy needs. This voluntary fund of and by democracies will help provide those new democracies or democratic movements with the resources, expertise, training, and support needed to consolidate — or in some cases prevail — in their efforts to bring about democratic reform. Annan should take the necessary steps to ensure that this fund is not encumbered but instead able to direct its support to those countries in need, and should develop complementary systems that provide rule-of-law training and political reform expertise.
- **Work to ensure that non-democracies are not allowed on the Human Rights Commission or on his newly-proposed Human Rights Council.** Perhaps the crowning achievement of the U.N. Commission on Human Rights was the creation of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The advancement of this declaration has been the key purpose and function of the Commission. However, the Commission has become a sham in recent years, because of its domination by non-democracies, the fact that it is chaired by such human rights abusers as Syria and Iran, and the fact that it has failed to pass resolutions condemning China and other leading human-rights abusers. Such actions have made a mockery out of the Commission. As the United States and other leading member states have maintained for years, Annan should state that the Commission will only be made up of democracies. Non-democracies and countries that do not respect the fundamental principles established in the Universal Declaration have no place on the Commission or on Annan's newly proposed Human Rights Council, both of which are composed of member states elected from the UNGA.

If the U.N. fails to enact major institutional reforms it will only accelerate the process of like-minded nations working outside the United Nations to form coalitions to solve and manage problems the United Nations was unable to address, thereby eroding its relevance. Therefore, the time is now for Kofi Annan to make recommendations and undertake an agenda that puts the principles of democracy and freedom at the center of the U.N.'s work.

Conclusion

June 26, 2005 marks the 60th anniversary of the signing of the U.N. Charter. This serves as an appropriate time to reflect on the U.N.'s successes and failures — and it provides the political momentum to bring about major institutional reform. John Bolton as the next U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations — his knowledge of the U.N. system, ideas for reform, and endorsement by Annan himself — will allow the United States to play a leading role in directing the United Nations in a way that more accurately reflects U.S. goals and objectives.

It is in the United States' interest to promote a strong United Nations — a United Nations that is efficient in its operation; transparent in its bookkeeping and information sharing; accountable in its decisions to the 191 member states comprising the world body; and understands its place in the international system. A strong U.N. does not mean acting as a world government or seeking to usurp sovereignty from nation states either in the fields of law, taxation, or the use of force. Rather, a strong United Nations means being effective in carrying

out the functions and responsibilities assigned to it by the institution's founders: preventing violence; maintaining peace; providing humanitarian relief, health care, and development assistance; and protecting civilians.

A United Nations that operates within and according to the boundaries of the mandate given to it by the founders is a United Nations that compliments U.S. national interest — and is a United Nations that can play a constructive role in advancing the principles of democracy, freedom, and the respect for human rights. As President Reagan said in a 1983 address to the U.N. General Assembly:

“From the beginning, our hope for the United Nations has been that it would reflect the international community at its best. The U.N. at its best can help us transcend fear and violence and can act as an enormous force for peace and prosperity. Working together, we can combat international lawlessness and promote human dignity. If the governments represented in this chamber want peace as genuinely as their peoples do, we shall find it. We can do so by reasserting the moral authority of the United Nations.”²¹

²¹ Remarks by President Ronald Reagan before the 38th session of the U.N. General Assembly, September 27, 1983.